



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**MANAGER'S REPORT**

DATE ISSUED: June 10, 2004

REPORT NO. 04-130

ATTENTION: Land Use and Housing Committee  
Agenda of June 16, 2004

SUBJECT: Dogs Off Leash: Locations, Status, Procedures and Policies

SUMMARY

Issue(s) – Should the City Council:

- 1) Designate Permanent Off Leash Areas (where one year trials have successfully concluded) at: Doyle Community Park, Dusty Rhodes Neighborhood Park, Kearny Mesa Community Park and Torrey Highlands Neighborhood Park (Maintenance Assessment District).
- 2) Adopt one of four alternative solutions for Grape Street Park Off Leash area in Balboa Park.
- 3) Adopt procedure revisions to the community input process for considering, initiating, reviewing status, modifying or revoking Off Leash areas.
- 4) Recommend the development of an annual procedure for Off Leash User Group registration.
- 5) Recommend the development of City Wide policy standards for Off Leash area development as an element of a City Wide Parks System Master Plan.

Manager's Recommendation(s) – Approve the following recommendations:

- 1) Designate Permanent Off Leash Areas (where one year trials have successfully concluded) at: Doyle Community Park, Dusty Rhodes Neighborhood Park, Kearny

Mesa Community Park and Torrey Highlands Neighborhood Park (Maintenance Assessment District).

- 2) Adopt one of four alternative solutions for Grape Street Park Off Leash area.
- 3) Adopt procedure revisions to the community input process for considering, initiating, reviewing status, modifying or revoking Off Leash areas.
- 4) Recommend the development of an annual procedure for Off Leash User Group registration.
- 5) Recommend the development of City Wide policy standards for Off Leash area development as an element of a City Wide Parks System Master Plan.

Other Recommendation(s) – See specific recommendations for each proposed sub-area.

Fiscal Impact – None with this action. Maintenance of the aforementioned sites are managed through the respective operational divisions.

## BACKGROUND

On June 11, 2002, the City Council approved several actions regarding Off Leash dog areas throughout the City. These actions also established procedures for the review and initiation of new Off Leash areas. Some of the previous actions required future consideration and subsequent action by the City Council.

At this time, staff is returning to update the City Council on the status of Off Leash areas and to finalize the initial actions taken by the Council as part of the June 2002 motion.

## DISCUSSION

1. As part of the actions in 2002, the City Council initiated one-year trial, Off Leash areas at five existing park sites. These sites were: Cabrillo Heights Neighborhood Park, Doyle Community Park, Dusty Rhodes Neighborhood Park, Kearny Mesa Community Park and Torrey Highlands Neighborhood Park. Four of the sites have been constructed and have completed the one-year trial period. The fifth site (Cabrillo Heights Neighborhood Park) did not receive sufficient community interest or funding and has been discontinued as a potential Off Leash area.

Each of the other four sites has completed the trial period and is ready for City Council consideration for permanent designation of the Off Leash areas. In preparation for the City Council action, staff has reviewed each of the sites and received input from the appropriate advisory bodies regarding the success of the trial period and issues that have arisen regarding the Off Leash areas. The following is a list of the comments and recommendations received for each of the sites.

- Doyle Community Park (completed the one year trial period February 2004) – The Off Leash area is turf and approximately 0.90 acre in size, and is divided into two fenced Off Leash areas; one is for small dogs and one is for all dogs.

The overall community response to this site has been very positive and the Off Leash users have done a good job of monitoring the area and enforcing the rules. The site is

very well used and the community has been very active in the site development and operation. The Off Leash users at this site are interested in expanding the Off Leash area and investigating lighting for night time use.

- Dusty Rhodes Neighborhood Park (completed the one year trial period May 2004)  
– The site is turf and approximately 1.5 acres in size. The area is not divided into sub-areas; all Off Leash users are contained within one area.

The area has been very well utilized and the Off Leash users would like to see the area increased to five acres in size. Many would like to have a drinking fountain added to the area, providing water for park users and dogs. Parking at the site has been a concern and many users would like the expansion of the area to extend to the west adjacent to the parking off of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard. This would allow visitors to park in either of the two existing parking lots and enter the Off Leash area.

- Kearny Mesa Community Park (completed the one year trial period March 2004)  
– The site is turf and is approximately 1.1 acres in size. The area is not divided into sub-areas; all Off Leash users are contained within one area.

The site is located next to a multi-purpose field with sports lighting and the Off Leash area receives spill light, which allows evening use. The site has been very popular with many community members who enjoy the personal interaction that takes place at the site as well as dog interaction. The Off Leash users would like to have water for their dogs and they are concerned about the amount of available parking during the day when Mesa College students use the park parking lots.

- Torrey Highlands Neighborhood Park (completed the one year trial period August 2003) – This Off Leash area is both turf and bark mulch, and is approximately 1.0 acre in size. The area is not divided into sub-areas; all Off Leash users are contained within one area.

The area has been well used by community members and many support its continuation. However, the Maintenance Assessment District (MAD), which is responsible for the site maintenance, has been concerned about Off Leash users not abiding with the operational rules and the high level of maintenance that the site requires. In August of 2003 the MAD asked to continue the trial period for another year to better determine the long term maintenance impacts of the site. At the June 8, 2004 meeting of the Community Planning Group, the committee voted to recommend that Torrey Highlands become a permanent Off Leash area, with the following provisions:

- 1) The Off Leash user group will be required to provide funds for any extra labor or extraordinary expense needed to maintain the area, above and beyond what is already provided for the MAD landscape maintenance contract.
- 2) The Off Leash user group will be required to provide funds for any capital improvements proposed in the area.

- 3) The Off Leash user group is on notice that an alternative surface material may be required if a final reseeding proves unsuccessful later this spring/summer.
- 4) The user group shall be required to file a current application with the City.
- 5) The permanency status will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the user group is in conformance with and assists in the enforcement of dog park rules and regulations.

## SUMMARY

Each of the Off Leash sites has been well used, and the on-going operational issues have been limited. Staff however, continues to struggle with the on-going turf maintenance at nearly all of our Off Leash sites. This issue is compounded by the limited size of many of our sites. To address this issue, Park Planning staff will need to develop design standards that create Off Leash areas that can be successfully maintained. Some of the options that maybe considered as part of this process include establishing a minimum size for Off Leash areas that are to be maintained as turf.

Based on the demonstrated need, overall community support and the limited operational issues associated with these facilities, staff supports the formal adoption of these sites as permanent Off Leash areas.

2. Grape Street Park, Balboa Park – Grape Street Park is located at the intersection of Grape Street and 28<sup>th</sup> Street in Balboa Park. The Balboa Golf Course driving range is located to the west of the park, open space canyons are located to the north and south of the park, and residential neighborhoods are located to the east of the park. Although a part of Balboa Park, which is a regional park, Grape Street Park serves primarily as a neighborhood park.

Grape Street Park is a combination of turf areas, tree groves with picnic tables and native vegetation. A comfort station is located in the northern portion of the park. The park has approximately 3.6 acres of turf, 1.4 acres of tree groves with picnic tables and 0.8 acres of native vegetation; the total usable area of the park, excluding native vegetation, is approximately five acres. A lodge pole pine fence is located along the eastern boundary at 28<sup>th</sup> Street and a chain link fence is located on the western boundary adjacent to the Balboa Golf Course's driving range. The wood rail fence serves as the delineation for the Off Leash area for the park. There is no fencing on the northern or southern edges of the park.

Grape Street Park is used by both traditional park users as well as dog owners who wish to use the park for Off Leash recreation. Grape Street Park was designated in 1995 by the Park and Recreation Director as an unfenced, provisional Off Leash area, without restriction on hours or area of Off Leash use. On June 11, 2002, City Council designated Grape Street Park for Off Leash use with posted hours. The hours posted for Off Leash use are: Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday and holidays, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Dogs are required to be on a leash at all other times. Shortly after the 2002 City

Council action establishing hours of Off Leash use, the Dog Owners of Grape Street (DOGS) requested an expansion of the Off Leash hours at Grape Street Park. This request was supported by the Greater Golden Hill Planning Committee at their August 14, 2002 meeting. The request was then forwarded to the Balboa Park Committee for a formal recommendation.

Due to the potential of conflict between the two main user groups, the Balboa Park Committee recommended providing a separate fenced area within the park for Off Leash recreation. The hours of use within the fenced Off Leash area would be expanded to address the request from the Dog Owners of Grape Street. Dogs outside the Off Leash area would be required to be on a leash.

In an effort to achieve the goals of the Balboa Park Committee, the Park and Recreation Department contracted with the landscape architectural firm of ONA, Inc. to provide design alternatives for the Off Leash area. ONA, Inc. prepared three alternative designs for consideration by the Balboa Park Committee's Land Use Subcommittee. These alternatives were reviewed by the Subcommittee on July 17, 2003. The Subcommittee expressed a preference for Option #3 with modifications. The consultant was requested to make the changes and return to the Subcommittee with a revised plan.

August 21, 2003, the Land Use Subcommittee reviewed the revised plans for the preferred option for Grape Street Park. The revised plans incorporated the recommendations of the Subcommittee from the July 17, 2003 meeting. The Subcommittee requested additional minor changes be made, including enlarging the Off Leash area.

The attached schematic design for Off Leash improvements at Grape Street Park incorporates all of the comments of the Balboa Park Committee's Land Use Subcommittee. The plan provides approximately three acres of Off Leash area on the southern portion of the park, which is a combination of turf area and tree grove area. Approximately two acres of turf area and tree grove area is provided for traditional park use on the northern portion of the park. Dogs would be permitted in the traditional park use area but must remain on a leash.

The wood rail fence currently located on the eastern boundary of the park south of Grape Street would remain. The existing wood rail fence currently located on the eastern boundary of the park north of Grape Street would be relocated to define the new Off Leash area. Additional fencing to match the existing would be provided on the northern and southern edges of the proposed Off Leash area. The existing golf course driving range fencing would remain on the western boundary. The fencing on the northern boundary of the Off Leash area would provide a buffer between Off Leash use and traditional park use. The fencing on the southern boundary would serve to prevent dogs from entering the sensitive habitat area. An additional maintenance access gate would need to be provided for the golf course driving range outside of the Off Leash area.

The proposed schematic plan attempts to balance the needs of Off Leash dog users while still meeting the needs of neighborhood residents. The proposed plan would

allow for expanded hours of use for Off Leash dog users within the Off Leash area, and would also allow for expanded hours of use for traditional park users.

The following alternatives were presented to the Balboa Park Committee at their April 1, 2004 meeting:

ALTERNATIVES:

- a) Recommend approval of the schematic plan for the provision of a fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park, and recommend expanded hours of Off Leash use for the fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park.
- b) Recommend approval of the schematic plan for the provision of a fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park with modifications, and recommend expanded hours of Off Leash use for the fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park.
- c) Do not recommend approval of the schematic plan for the provision of a fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park, and maintain the current posted hours of Off Leash use.
- d) Do not recommend approval of the schematic plan for the provision of a fenced Off Leash area at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park, and recommend expanded hours of Off Leash use at Grape Street Park in Balboa Park

After considering the alternatives the Balboa Park Committee voted (4-3-0) to recommend approval of alternative “d” with the hours of operation for Off Leash use to be 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday and Holidays.

3. Over the past several years, Off Leash areas have been discussed in many public forums. These discussions have provided much valuable input and they have shaped the policies and procedures for the designation, design, alteration and operation of these facilities. However, utilizing many different community groups and public forums has raised some questions as to which community advisory groups are best able to consider Off Leash projects.

At this point, staff wishes to confirm the significance of the community review process and clarify the appropriate advisory groups who will participate in any future Off Leash area recommendations. Staff believes that although Off Leash areas have unique issues, they should be reviewed under the same process and procedures as any other proposed park improvement. This process would include review for consistency with community plan standards for any newly created parkland, followed by site specific design review, where the appropriate Park and Recreation advisory groups would take the lead for community input, as outlined in the recently adopted Council Policy 600-33 (Community Notification and Input for City-Wide Park Development Projects). All final recommendations would be forwarded to the City Council for final action.

As part of the review process the proposed Off Leash User group would follow the notification steps approved as part of Manager's Report # 02-130 and Council Policy 600-33. This process will ensure that all interested parties are informed of the any proposed action and that they have an opportunity to participate in the review process.

4. Over the last few years several Off Leash areas have now been formally designated within the City. As indicated in this report, these sites continue to serve their communities well. However, as time goes by it is important that City operational staff have updated information from each of the Off Leash user groups. With this in mind, staff wishes to initiate a process where each Off Leash user group completes an annual information application. This application will provide staff with site specific information regarding the Off Leash use at the site as well as contact information regarding the user group. With this application, staff will be able to coordinate any issues that may arise regarding use of the site.
5. As the many items outlined in this report demonstrate, Off Leash areas continue to be a significant issue within the Park and Recreation Department from both a park planning and operational perspective. Many issues regarding the development and maintenance of these areas are evolving and will continue to do so for the next several years. In order to properly address these issues, staff will need to develop policies and design standards for site selection, design and construction and maintenance of Off Leash areas. These efforts should be coordinated with a comprehensive City Wide Parks System Master Plan. Some of the issues that need to be addressed as part of this effort include:

**Policy Issues:**

- a) How should we categorize Off Leash areas; are they Regional, Community or Neighborhood Facilities?
- b) How many Off Leash areas does the City need?
- c) Should Off Leash User Groups be required to off-set required maintenance costs that exceed the standard supported by the general fund? If so how?
- d) How should Off Leash areas be monitored, by Park users? Police? Animal Control? Park Rangers? Operational Staff?
- e) Should fencing be required at all Off Leash areas? If so, how high?

**Design Issues:**

- a) What should the minimum size be for an Off Leash areas?
- b) Should the minimum size be contingent on the surface material, i.e., turf vs. decomposed granite or mulch?
- c) How should required parking be calculated?

- d) Should the number of dogs in an area be restricted based on its size? If so, how should this be enforced?
- e) Should all Off Leash areas include multiple pens to allow turf areas to rest?
- f) What standard program elements should be included in a new site? (Parking, Fencing, Drinking Fountain, Lighting, Site Furniture)

### INFORMATIONAL UPDATE

The following is an informational status update on the other Off Leash areas within the City. This is information only. No action is required at these sites.

- a) Rancho Bernardo Community Park Expansion – This new construction project will expand the park and create a new 1.5 acre Off Leash area and add parking near the Off Leash site. The project is currently completing the environmental review process and is scheduled for construction in FY 05.
- b) Fiesta Island and Dog Beach – These areas received new signs regarding the rules and regulations governing Off Leash activities and they continue to function well.
- c) Maddox Neighborhood Park – This site completed the one-year trial period prior to the 2002 hearing and was designated by City Council as an Off Leash site. Based on the Council action, the Off Leash area has been expanded to 1 acre. The site has been improved by the construction of an accessible walk and the addition of an accessible drinking fountain.
- d) Cadman Neighborhood Park – This site also completed the one-year trial period prior to the City Council hearing and was designated an Off Leash area. This site is not fenced and the Off Leash area is limited to morning and evening use hours. The site continues to function well and the site has not experienced any significant problems with the restricted hours of operations.
- e) Nates Point, Balboa Park – This site has been operational as an Off Leash area for some time. Currently, a design is being pursued that will improve the site with a new walk, an accessible drinking fountain, an accessible picnic table and fencing for a portion of the site. Funding for these improvements is currently being sought and construction timing will depend on funding availability.
- f) Morley Field, Balboa Park – City Council recommended that this site be relocated to another area which would have less conflicts with existing park uses when funding is identified. To date, the community does not support relocation of the area, no new funding exists to relocate this use and therefore, it continues to function in its previous location.
- g) Capehart Park – This new site was designated for Off Leash use as part of the 2002 City Council actions and construction was completed in February 2004. Community use is growing and the new site has received positive community response.



- h) Noble Community Park - -- This new construction project will create a new 0.8 acre Off Leash area as part of the expanded Community Park and Library. The project is currently completing the environmental review process and is scheduled to be complete in FY06.

ALTERNATIVE(S)

- 1) Do not adopt any or all of the recommended Off Leash designations, alternatives, procedures and policies.
- 2) Amend any or all of the recommended Off Leash designations, alternatives, procedures and policies.

Respectfully submitted,

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Bruce A. Herring  
Deputy City Manager

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Ellen Oppenheim  
Park and Recreation Director

EO/MM

Attachments: [1\). Manager's Report No.02-130](#)  
[2\). Council Policy 600-33 \(Community Notification and Input for City-Wide Park Development Projects\)](#)  
[3\). Schematic Design for Grape Street Off Leash area](#)  
[4\).Map of Existing and Planned Off Leash Areas with in the City](#)